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Robertson, Thomas William
Peace at any price

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1872



PEACE AT ANY PRICE.

A Farce,

IN ONE ACT.

(Adapted from the French.)

BY

T. W. ROBERTSON,

AUTHOR OF

Caste; Ours; Society; M.P.; Dreams; School; Play; Home; David Garrick;
Jocrisse the Juggler; Chevalier de St. George; Ruy Blas; Sea of Ice;
Noemie; Ladies' Battle; Duke's Daughter; Not at all Jealous;
Half Caste; An Evening's Entertainment; Cantab;
Two Gay Deceivers; Star of the North;
Birds of Prey; &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

THEATRICAL PUBLISHER,

LONDON.

1872.

PEACE AT ANY PRICE.



Another version of this Farce was played at the Haymarket Theatre, by the following

Characters:

ALEXANDER Mr. CHARLES MATHEWS.

CATHERINE Mrs. CHARLES MATHEWS.

A variety of Voices, which, though not seen, it is hoped will be heard.

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PEACE AT ANY PRICE.

SCENE.—*A meanly furnished room. Door, C.; door, R. 1 E.; table and 3 chairs, C.; fire and mantel-pieces, R.; desk on table, L.; two or three articles lying about, showing that the occupant of the room is a milliner.*

CATHERINE. (*at door, C., and speaking to some one off the stage*) Good bye, uncle, good bye—all right—I won't forget. (*coming down*) Poor old gentleman! Going down to visit his friends at Lincoln—and the tailor to disappoint him of his new coat. Never mind, it will be here in the course of the day, and I can send it on to him by the next train. Now I can dress myself. I must look my very handsomest to-day, for everything depends upon it. A rich German Baron has fallen in love with me. I've never seen him, but he has seen me, and has ordered Mr. Coupler, the manager of the Metropolitan Mutual Matrimonial Association, to ask my hand in marriage; and Mr. Coupler, who is a highly respectable man—oh!—highly respectable, bless you—only wants a deposit of two pounds. I hadn't got the two pounds, so he let me owe it him—he gave me credit for it—till I received the monthly allowance my uncle makes me—which he always leaves in that desk for me, dear old man. What will he say when he hears that his niece is a German Baroness? Ha, ha! he'll like that better than he did the offer from young Sphooney, the chemist and druggist's apprentice over the way. When he proposed to my uncle for me, uncle gave him a good hiding with his stick.

VOICE. (*outside*) Bob, my boots!

ALEXANDER. (*outside*) Bob, my coat!

ANOTHER VOICE. (*outside*) Bob, my coffee!

CATH. There's a row. That's the worst of furnished lodgings, but I must go and dress. *Exit, R.*

BOB. (*outside*) But you can't see her—she's not up yet—besides she don't want to see you.

SPHOONEY. (*outside, half-crying*) But I only want to say one word to her—only one wor—

ALEX. (*outside*) Bob! my coat.

BOB. (*opens door and throws coat on chair near it*) There's your coat.

Re-enter CATHERINE, R.

CATH. I'm done—Uncle's forgotten to leave me my monthly allowance—and I haven't got a halfpenny in the world. I want gloves—and a collar—and lappets and—I'm regularly done.

SPHOON. (*outside, c.*) Miss Catherine!

CATH. Who's there?

SPHOON. Me, Sphoony.

CATH. It's the chemist and druggist's apprentice. Mr. Sphoony, have you got such a thing as five shillings about you?

SPHOON. No—I've got three half-pence.

CATH. (*imitating*) Three-half-pence! (*aside*) The fool!

SPHOON. Oh! Miss Catherine!

CATH. I'll soon get rid of him. I say, Mr. Sphooney, you'd better be off, here's my uncle coming with his cane.

SPHOON. (*with fright*) Good-bye, dear Catherine—I'm dying for you! (*he is heard to fall down stairs precipitately*)

CATH. There he goes—(*SPHOONEY cries outside*) right to the bottom! Serve him right—a fool—not to have five shillings. What shall I do for money to—(*seeing coat*) What's that? my uncle's coat—brass buttons—yes—it is—I've an idea—money I must have, or I shall never be a German Baroness. There's a pawnbroker's shop close to—it must be so. (*taking coat*) You came for my uncle, and now you shall go to my uncle.

Exit CATHERINE, C. to L.

ALEX. (*outside*) Bob!—my coat—dash it all——

BOB. (*outside*) Oh, I beg pardon, sir, I put it in this room. I'll get it out presently.

ALEX. Presently! I'll get it at once.

Enter ALEXANDER, door C., in his shirt sleeves, a pair of boots under his arm, smoking a cigar.

ALEX. I beg your pardon, sir, for the intrusion, but—(*looking round*) Nobody! I beg your pardon, but you haven't seen a brown coat with brass buttons. Perhaps he has gone into his bed-room. (*going to R. D.*) Young man, have you seen my coat? I've only got one—and I want it to go out in. Here are your boots, which they brought into my room. Nobody—decidedly nobody. I must wait for them. (*sits*) Well, here I am in London, at which little village I arrived a month ago, with twenty pounds in my pocket, and a brown coat with brass buttons. Now a young man of my fascinating personal appearance and insinuating manner, ought to make a

good match—ought to marry a rich wife. I have met one lady—a widow—about the age of thirty-six—or sixty-three, who appeared struck by my aforesaid fascinating personal appearance, insinuating manners, and brown coat, with brass buttons; but she was too old, too insufferably ancient—too ridiculously antideluvian. Poor Mrs. Boshham! This fellow doesn't seem to come in—confound him—I must go and look for him. I've a most particular appointment.

Exit ALEXANDER, C. to R.—*pause*.

Enter CATHERINE, with little packets, C. from L.

CATH. Well, pawnbrokers will never die of lending too much money. Twelve shillings—for a beautiful coat, and they wanted to persuade me that it wasn't new. (*putting ticket on mantelpiece*, R. C.) I must get you out as soon as ever I can. How the money flies! I've spent it all. Never mind—I've got everything I wanted, a waist-band, gloves, yes—everything. (*taking off her shawl*) I've torn a little hole in my shawl. I must be all right to-day. Mr. Coupler said I must. Where's a needle?

She leaves her shawl on chair, and goes, off R. door.

Enter ALEXANDER, C.

ALEX. Well, that's funny. I can't find that brown coat with brass buttons. What a fool I should look if any pretty woman should see me in this coquettish and negligent costume!—it might give rise to the most poetical ideas. This fellow seems as if he will never come back. (*he sneezes*) Confound it! I shall catch cold! and I who have only just got over the bronchitis—at-chew! How I did cough all last winter—'pon my word I used to cough to that extent that I stopped my ears with cotton-wool that I mightn't hear myself. However, I got over it, thanks to a mysterious basin of gruel that I found every night at my door, wrapped round with a worsted stocking. How the devil did it come there? Was it fairy gruel? Hollo! my cigar's out—never mind—there's a fire—where is there a match?—ah! here. (*taking ticket from chimney-piece*) What's this? a pawn ticket, a note on my uncle's bank—sacred emblem. (*reading*) "Brown coat—brass buttons" confound it—it's mine, then my fellow-lodger has boned my coat and popped it. What's his confounded name? "Catherine Jones." A woman. I've been undressed, then, by a woman. (*seeing shawl*) There's her shawl—a very good one too. I dare say, now, they'd lend twelve shillings on it. Since she has taken the liberty of popping my coat, I'll return the compliment by popping her shawl.

Exit, C.

Enter CATHERINE, R. door.

CATH. I've found a needle at last. Where's my shawl? I left it on that chair. What's this?—a cigar end. I don't smoke cigars. Who has been in my room (*seeing boots*) and taken off their boots here?—the impudence! Well, I'm sure—Out you go! (*throws boots out of the window, L. C.*) But where's my shawl (*ALEXANDER runs on breathless, C.*)

ALEX. I want sixpence more.

CATH. Who's that?

ALEX. (*seeing her*) Is this room yours?

CATH. Yes.

ALEX. Then you're the thief—

CATH. Sir, sir!

ALEX. Who pawned my coat?

CATH. Your coat?

ALEX. Yes, my coat—a brown coat with brass buttons.

CATH. Was it yours?

ALEX. Was it mine? Oh, come, I say, that won't do; but to return to the point, I want sixpence more.

CATH. What do you mean?

ALEX. I went just now to the pawn-shop—you know where it is, and I unfolded my sad tale and my plaid shawl.

CATH. Your plaid shawl?

ALEX. The man looked at it and turned it over, and looked at it again, "Twelve shillings" said he; "All right," said I—he gave me a ticket, and the twelve bob. "Now," said I, giving him the other ticket, "I'll take that out," said I; "A brown coat with brass buttons, twelve shillings, there you are;" "Threepence more" said he; "What for?" said I. "The interest," said he. "Oh," said I; "Then lend me more on the shawl," said I, "There's your twelve shillings, now lend me some more." "Threepence more" said he. "What for?" said I. "The interest," said he. "Perdition" said I, and I came away in a passion; and here I am just as I went, and all through that infernal shawl of yours.

CATH. My shawl—my—what, do you mean to say that you have pawned my beautiful Paisley shawl?

ALEX. Of course I have, and now I want sixpence more.

CATH. I haven't got sixpence.

ALEX. Not got sixpence! What have you done with the twelve shillings you got on my coat?

CATH. Spent it all.

ALEX. By Jove! you make the money fly! Easy come—easy go I suppose. But don't you see, ma'am, I've got no other coat, and if I go about in this way for a month or two longer, I shall catch cold. I must have sixpence more, so pawn something else.

CATH. I've got nothing else to pawn.

ALEX. What! not to the value of sixpence?

CATH. No.

ALEX. What! haven't you got another shawl?

CATH. No.

ALEX. Only got one shawl?

CATH. Well; you've only got one coat.

BOB, *knocking outside*, C.

BOB. Beg pardon, sir, but I made a mistake—those boots were not yours, them were the first floor's.

ALEX. I'll give you them directly. (*looking for them*) Eh? Where are they? Madam, when I came here, I had a pair of boots.

CATH. Oh! I didn't know whose they were, so I—

ALEX. Eh? What! have you popped them too?

CATH. No; but as I thought people had no right to leave their boots in my room, I—I—

ALEX. Well?

CATH. Threw them out of the window.

ALEX. Whew! (*walking about*) Thrown them out of the window. You frightful wretch! you infernal scoundrel!

CATH. Sir, how dare you?

ALEX. Pledging coats—throwing away boots. You—(*he is seized with a violent fit of sneezing*) There, I've got cold again, all through you—being in this state.

BOY. (*outside*, c., *knocking*) Please, sir, will you give me the boots? the first floor's waiting for 'em.

ALEX. Atchew! At-chew!

CATH. Leave my room, sir.

VOICE. (*outside*) My boots.

BOY. Please, the first floor wants his boots.

BOB. Ask the gentleman for 'em.

ALEX. (*at door*) If you don't be off, I'll skin you, you young vagabond.

Runs out, c., to kick LITTLE BOY.

CATH. The brute! I'm glad I've got rid of him at last.

ALEX. (*outside*) Confound it! I can't get into my room—the key was in the pocket of my coat—the pocket of the coat you pawned, madam. (*entering c. door*) The coat you pawned, Miss Jerry Abershaw. The coat you pawned, female Jack Sheppard!

CATH. Well, I'm sure.

ALEX. Now I've got no room of my own to go to, I must stop in yours. (*sitting*) I must establish myself here—here—in your room, Dick Turpin.

CATH. What! here!

ALEX. Here, Jeremy Diddler, here—here, Sixteen-stringed Jack, here!

CATH. In my room?

ALEX. In your room, Fra Diavolo, in your room—luckily I'm safe. You can't pledge *me*, and I've nothing valuable about me, Miss Barrington, nothing valuable. (*feeling in his pockets, finds a letter*) Ah! my appointment, I forgot it.

CATH. Forgot what?

ALEX. Claude du Val, I've a particular appointment, and thanks to you, Colonel Blood, I've no coat—no coat.

CATH. Never mind, sir, you shall have your coat, though I sell my ear-rings to get it out.

ALEX. Well, sell your ear-rings, Artful Dodger, sell 'em.

CATH. The beautiful ear-rings my uncle gave me.

ALEX. Your uncle! Absurd, just as if you'd got an uncle.

CATH. I'd let you know I have, sir!

ALEX. Good! Then your aunt must have stolen him.

CATH. Oh! I—I wish I was a man!

ALEX. You'd have been transported by this time if you had been.

CATH. Oh! I—you shall have your coat.

Exit CATHERINE, C.

ALEX. Nice girl that. I think she must belong to a gang—an organised gang—no doubt of it, and here's where she conceals her plunder. (*approaching desk*) What's this? a book. (*reading*) "Expenses, January." A diary. (*about to open it*) Stop; yet why should I be delicate with a woman who actually undressed me? Here's an account of her burglaries by double and single entry. (*reading*) "Saturday, crochet hook." A crochet hook—a hook of course, to pick locks with; crochet must be a technical term. "Gruel. Tenth—gruel for the poor gentleman who coughs." Eh? "Twelfth—gruel for ditto. Thirteenth—ditto for ditto." Why that's me, I'm ditto—that is, the poor gentleman who coughs is me. How very kind of her to send me gruel in a worsted stocking to alleviate my cough. Her heart is good, though her hands are—poor little thing—poor little thing. If I could bring her back to the flowery paths of virtue—that is—I mean honesty.

CATHERINE enters hastily, C.

CATH. It's a shame! it's a robbery!

ALEX. What's up? lovely, but light-fingered young lady—what is up?

CATH. I thought I should get rid of you if I sold my ear-rings—and the watchmaker told me the stones were only imitation—(*crying*) but I—it's a robbery.

ALEX. Ah, you see you don't like being robbed yourself.

CATH. How dare you laugh at me?

ALEX. I'm not laughing at you, delicate, but dishonest young person. (*aside*) She's very pretty. (*aloud*) if you only knew my feelings—

CATH. Your feelings!

ALEX. Since I have discovered——

CATH. Discovered what. (*he coughs significantly*) Surely I know that cough! (*he coughs again*) Yes—it is—

ALEX. It is me—it was me all last winter, disinterested swindler, and your gruel is written here (*his hand on his heart*) in characters of—oatmeal.

CATH. What, do you flatter yourself you kept me awake all last winter with your cough!

ALEX. Well, then,—you said to yourself, “Rather than let that noisy brute prevent me from sleeping I'll give him his gruel.”

CATH. No, I didn't—I said to myself, “Perhaps that poor fellow is ill—alone—without a fire, perhaps without money—with no mother, or sister, or anybody else to care for him, or look after him—so I may as well make him a little gruel—I shall never feel the want of it.”

ALEX. Generous robber! (*aside*) she is devilish pretty. Beautiful thief—angelic housebreaker—why not renounce a profession that must have its dangers?

CATH. A profession.

ALEX. Charming ruffian—yes—renounce your present awful trade.

CATH. Oh! I couldn't. How am I to live?

ALEX. Oh, do something else.

CATH. But I never was taught anything else.

ALEX. (*aside*) She has been brought up to it from childhood. And you have been a thief all your life, have you?

CATH. A thief! I—(*seriously, then bursting into a fit of laughter*) Oh! I see. I see your mistake. (*seriously*) I beg you to understand that I am no more a thief than you are.

ALEX. Oh! my coat!

CATH. And my shawl!

ALEX. Oh! but that was different.

CATH. Very different! for I thought it was my uncle's coat, which the tailor said he would bring here to-day—and as my uncle makes me a monthly allowance—I—just for a few days—

ALEX. Put it up—I see.

CATH. Now my shawl—

ALEX. Eh!

CATH. You couldn't think that was your uncle's coat, could you?

ALEX. Ho, ho! then it seems I'm the thief.

CATH. (*imitating*) "Generous robber, you are; renounce your present trade." Ha, ha, ha! but I mustn't laugh, for thanks to you, I shall ruin an appointment that might have settled me for life. (*sitting*)

ALEX. My case, exactly. Oh, dear! (*sitting*)

CATH. Oh, dear! I can't go out without a shawl!

ALEX. Nor I without a coat, and I am the cause of your affliction. I have been so cruel—to one who gave me gruel. (*starting up*) I'll get you a shawl.

CATH. How?

ALEX. Never mind, stay you here. (*aside*) I'll borrow one of Mrs. Boshham. *Exit ALEXANDER, C.*

CATH. Poor fellow, perhaps he'll lose a good situation, all through me. It's very kind of him to go to get me a shawl. If somehow I could only get him a coat.

SPHOON. (*at door, L., outside*) Miss Catherine—

CATH. There's that young chemist again—what a bore. (*struck with an idea*) But he has got a coat on. (*partly opening door, L.*) Mr. Sphooney. (*very graciously*)

SPHOON. (*on threshold*) Oh, Miss Catherine!

CATH. How shall I get it? (*aside, smiles at him*)

SPHOON. Oh, Miss Catherine!

CATH. Oh, here's uncle, but don't go—(*pulling the tail of his coat on to the stage*) if he sees you, he'll kill you.

SPHOON. Oh, lord! (*CATHERINE shuts door, so that the tail is caught in the door, and is in sight of the audience*)

CATH. I've got the tail, now how to get the body?

SPHOON. (*outside*) Hoy! you've shut the door.

CATH. Run as hard as you can.

SPHOON. But my coat tail has caught.

CATH. Take your coat off—leave it behind you, and I'll send it.

SPHOON. But—

CATH. (*screams*) Please don't kill him, uncle. (*he is heard to tumble down stairs, CATHERINE opens door and takes coat*) There, I've got a coat at last. (*looks at it*) I hope it will fit him. (*she hides it behind her*)

Enter ALEXANDER, door, C., with a handsome shawl, which he holds behind him.

ALEX. Who's that poor devil, without a coat, who I met tumbling down stairs? (*sees CATHERINE*) Aha!

CATH. Aha!

ALEX. I've got it!

CATH. So have I!

ALEX. There's a shawl for you.

CATH. And there's a coat for you.

(they throw them across to each other—they put on shawl and coat and dance about stage)

ALEX. Stop, *(jealously)* how came you possessed of this coat?

CATH. *(aside)* I mustn't tell him how I got it, or he'll say I'm returning to my bad habits. *(aloud)* I borrowed it of the landlady—it's her husband's.

ALEX. Generous woman! *(embracing her)*

CATH. But where did you get this shawl?

ALEX. *(aside)* I mustn't tell her that I borrowed it of old Mother Bookham—I—I bought it.

CATH. Where did you get the money?

ALEX. I—I pawned the family plate—chest and all
(clock outside strikes one)

CATH. One o'clock! I must be off.

ALEX. So must I. Which way are you going?

CATH. Strand.

ALEX. So am I—what number?

CATH. 785.

ALEX. So am I.

CATH. What—to Mr. Coupler's?

ALEX. Metropolitan Mutual Matrimonial Association.

CATH. Exactly.

ALEX. Stop. *(looking at her)* Is it possible that you can be rich young German Baroness who has fallen in love with me?

CATH. Is it possible that you can be the rich young German Baron who has fallen in love with me? *(both laugh)*

ALEX. It's destiny—fate—we must yield to it. I offer you my hand.

CATH. Go along!

ALEX. In solemn earnestness, I love you; your water-gruel has bewitched me. Attentive and amiable one, be mine.

CATH. Will you love me?

ALEX. Were you a pawnbroker, I'd say I pledge myself to do it.

CATH. Then I accept. *(embrace)*

ALEX. Hurra! By the bye what's your name?

CATH. Catherine Cookham, what's yours?

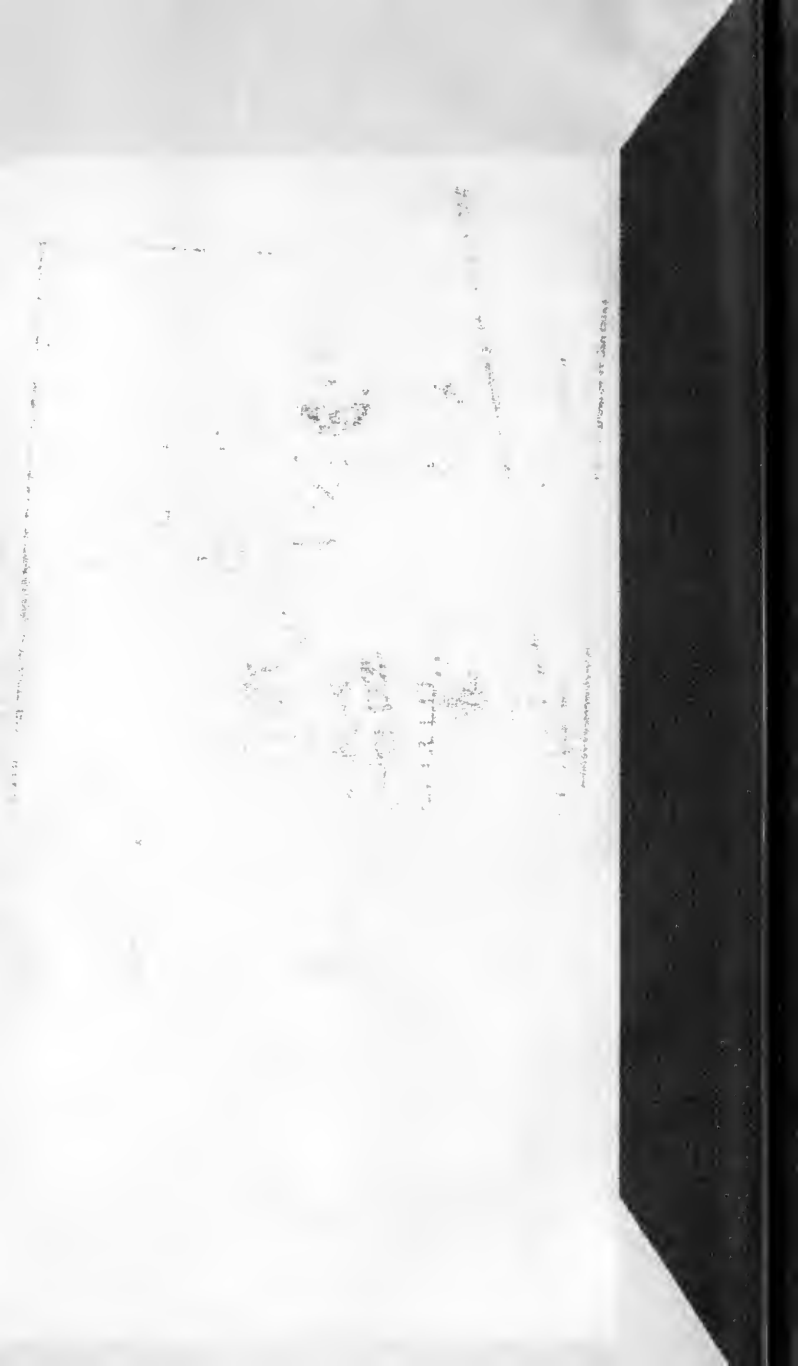
ALEX. Alexander Hookham; you see it's a settled thing, Hookham shall belong to Cookham, and Cookham shall be Hookham's, and, if hereafter there should be any miniature Hookhams, and duodecimo Cookhams, we must both remember our mutual pledges.

CATH. Mind, you mustn't call me names—there must be no quarreling.

ALEX. Oh, no ! Peace at any price !

CATH. Let that be the motto of our married life, that is *(to audience)* with your permission, join your hands as well as ours—and though always on the alert to succour the distressed—to help the weak—and to destroy brute force—preserve *this* PIECE AT ANY PRICE.

Curtain.



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